

Forty Traditions

The **Forty Traditions** (*al-arbaʿūn ḥadīth^{an}*) is a popular genre of *ḥadīth* collections found throughout the Muslim world from at least the third/ninth century until the present. These works generally consist of forty *ḥadīths*, often with some commentary, and frequently refer to a variant of the Prophetic *ḥadīth*, “Whoever memorises/preserves forty *ḥadīths* of my *sunna* (or, my traditions) for my community, God will raise him among the jurists on Resurrection Day.” They can be divided broadly into authored collections, often on a specific theme, and posthumous collections extracted by a dedicated student from his teacher’s personal collection of narrations.

1. THE “FORTY ḤADĪTHS”

TRADITION

The final *ḥadīth* of the earliest extant Forty Tradition collection, by Muḥammad b. Aslam al-Ṭūsī (d. 242/856–7), is a variation of the “Whoever memorises/preserves forty *ḥadīths*” tradition, with at least two notoriously weak transmitters in its *isnād* (chain of authorities). The early Forty Traditions collections of al-Ḥasan b. Sufyān al-Nasawī (d. 303/915–6) and Abū Bakr al-Ājurī (d. 360/971) also contain variations of this *ḥadīth*, and it is found narrated on the authority of the sixth Shīʿī Imām Jaʿfar al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) in the *Kutāb al-ʿilm* of Abū Jaʿfar al-Kulaynī’s (d. 329/941) canonical Imāmī Shīʿī collection of *akhbār* (reports) titled *Uṣūl al-kāfi*. By the mid-fifth/eleventh century, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) could include in his *Jāmiʿ bayān al-ʿilm wa-faḍliḥ* seven versions of this *ḥadīth* circulating in al-Andalus, and, by the end of the following century in Baghdad, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201)

assembled, in his *al-ʿIlal al-mutanāhiya fī l-aḥādīth al-wāhiya*, twenty-four narrations of this tradition, traced through thirteen different Companions. This *ḥadīth* is not found in any of the canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections or in the noncanonical compilations of the early period, perhaps because Sunnī *ḥadīth* critics from at least the time of Ibn ʿAdī (d. 365/975–6) and al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) have declared all versions of it weak, if not forged (the most comprehensive critical analysis of this *ḥadīth* is that by Ibn al-Jawzī, in *al-ʿIlal al-mutanāhiya*, 1:119–29). While critical Sunnī scholars universally considered this *ḥadīth* weak, Imāmī Shīʿī scholars have held it authentic, according to the great twentieth-century scholar, Aghā Buzurg al-Tihrānī, in *al-Dharīʿa fī taṣānīf al-Shīʿa* (1:409), who cites Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī’s (d. 1111/1699) discussion of this tradition in *Kutāb al-ʿilm*, *bāb* 20 of *Bihār al-anwār* (al-Majlisī includes ten narrations of this tradition in this chapter).

2. OVERVIEW OF FORTY

TRADITIONS WORKS

Little research has been undertaken into the Forty Traditions genre of *ḥadīth* compilation. The contemporary Azharī-trained scholar Sahl al-ʿūd composed a useful guide titled *al-Muʿīn ʿalā maʿrifat kutub al-arbaʿūn*, in which he mentions the titles of 529 Forty Traditions books, and Aghā Buzurg al-Tihrānī identifies, in *al-Dharīʿa*, approximately one hundred titles, many of which are in Persian. More than fifty years ago, Abdülkadir Karahan published an important study, *İslām-Türk edebiyatında Kirk Hadīs*, about the literary tradition of rendering Arabic Forty Traditions collections into Persian and Ottoman Turkish verse. The most useful work to date in a Western language is Louis Pouzet’s *Une*

herméneutique de la tradition islamique, which also includes a valuable critical edition and French translation of al-Nawawī's short commentary on his famous Forty Traditions book.

Sunnī scholars generally ascribe the inaugural Forty Traditions book to the master ascetic scholar 'Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), although it is never cited. The "second" book, by Muḥammad b. Aslam al-Ṭūsī, has been published, as have several other early collections. On the basis of a preliminary reading of multiple Forty Traditions books, it is possible to discern four broad categories of these works: basic Islamic teachings, thematic works, boasting works, and collections of exceptionally profound Prophetic statements.

3. BASIC ISLAMIC TEACHINGS

The early Sunnī collections of al-Ṭūsī, al-Nasawī, and al-Ājurri and Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī's (d. 1030/1621) popular Shī'ī collection contain *ḥadīths* about ablutions, prayer, almsgiving, and other basic Islamic teachings. They combine traditions reporting the prophet Muḥammad's actions along with his didactic statements, in contrast to later collections, which relate Prophetic statements almost exclusively, many of which are aphorisms. While al-Ṭūsī's Forty Traditions collection consists almost exclusively of legal and ethical *ḥadīths*, al-Ājurri's book begins with thirteen theological *ḥadīths*—including the hallmark Sunnī Gabriel tradition about *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* (submission, faith, and beautiful conduct), the "Ten Companions promised Paradise" *ḥadīth*, and the report that "My community will divide into seventy-three sects"—before shifting to legal topics and concluding with a few general traditions, such as "Religion is sincerity."

4. THEMATIC WORKS

Most of the Forty Traditions books published so far are thematic. Abū Sa'd al-Mālīnī (d. 412/1021–2), Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021–2), and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) all composed Forty Traditions books identifying the primary teachings—and, in the case of al-Mālīnī, teachers—of Ṣūfism. 'Abdallāh Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089) and Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) composed Forty Tradition works dedicated to promoting *ḥadīth*-based, *kalām*-free, theology. Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 637/1240) and Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī (1014/1606) each published Forty Traditions books consisting exclusively of divine *ḥadīths* (*ḥadīth qudsī*, traditions that are believed to contain God's statements conveyed by the Angel Gabriel to Muḥammad but not part of the Qur'ān). Abū l-Futūḥ al-Ṭā'ī (d. 555/1160) composed his Forty Traditions book *Kitāb al-arba'īn fī irshād al-sā'irīn ilā manāzil al-muttaqīn* in such a way that each *ḥadīth* passes through a distinct Companion, for whom he provides biographical information. The Ottoman-era Damascene Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-'Ajlūnī (d. 1162/1749) brought together the initial *ḥadīths* of forty classical *ḥadīth* collections in his *Iqd al-jawhar al-thamīn*. The Zaydī Forty Traditions collection, *al-Arba'īn al-Saylaqīyya*, by Abū l-Qāsim Zayd b. 'Abdallāh al-Saylaqī (d. before 390/1000?), is devoted overwhelmingly to the themes of asceticism and renunciation of worldly pleasures. The Meccan scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-Ḥaytamī (d. 974/1567) composed, as a gift for the Ottoman sultan Süleyman (Sulaymān) the Magnificent (r. 926–74/1520–66), a Forty Traditions book on the theme of justice. Other Forty Traditions books are dedicated to warfare, generosity, and marriage, among other themes.

5. BOASTING WORKS

The boasting genre is most apparent in books in which the compiler declares that he is improving upon an earlier Forty Traditions collection or emphasises the excellence of the elevated (meaning very short) *isnāds* of his narrations. Two of Abū l-Qāsim Ibn ‘Asākir’s (d. 571/1176) Forty Traditions books are good examples of this genre. In his ostentatiously titled *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn al-buldāniyya ‘an arbaʿīn min arbaʿīn li-arbaʿīn fī arbaʿīn* (“The book of forty [traditions] from forty [teachers] from forty [towns] passing through forty [Companions] on forty [topics]”), he states that he is improving upon Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī’s (d. 575/1180) forty-*ḥadīth* collection, in which al-Silafī narrated a single *ḥadīth* from forty of his teachers from forty different towns, adding to these stipulations the requirements that each *ḥadīth* be narrated through a distinct Companion and be on a distinct topic. Ibn ‘Asākir’s *al-Arbaʿīn ḥadīth min al-musāwāt* showcases his ability to collect traditions with elevated *isnāds*, which demonstrates his greater proximity to the Prophet than that of his contemporaries, whose *isnāds* presumably are longer, rendering them more remote from Muḥammad. Also of the boasting genre of Forty Traditions is Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Bakrī’s (d. 656/1258) *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn*. After lamenting, in his introduction, that every possible permutation of Forty Traditions book seems to have been written, he realises he could reach a new summit by compiling a book in which each *ḥadīth* is narrated with full *isnād* from a distinct collection of Forty Traditions, on the authority of a distinct Companion, about a distinct topic. This book provides valuable insight into the early growth of the genre of Forty Traditions books, especially in Khurāsān among Shāfiʿī scholars.

6. COLLECTIONS OF

EXCEPTIONALLY PROFOUND
PROPHETIC STATEMENTS

This type of collection may have become increasing prevalent after the publication of the most significant Sunnī Forty Traditions book, the *Arbaʿīn* of Muḥyī l-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277). In his brief introduction, al-Nawawī informs the reader that his collection will differ from earlier collections because it will include only sound *ḥadīths*, without *isnāds*, that touch upon the core teachings of Islam. His collection actually consists of forty-three traditions (numbered in most editions as forty-two, with two independent *ḥadīths* cited under the heading of *ḥadīth* 27). This short work has been translated into many languages, including English, and commentaries have been written on it by many major Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392), who added eight *ḥadīths* to round the number to fifty, Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401–2), Ibn Ḥajar al-Ḥaytamī, and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935). Thirty of the *ḥadīths* in al-Nawawī’s collection are found in one or both of the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and all but a handful of the remaining thirteen are found in other canonical collections. Unlike later works of this genre like the published Forty Traditions collections of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505) and Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762), al-Nawawī includes both longer *ḥadīths* and divine *ḥadīths*.

While the Forty Traditions books by al-Nawawī and al-ʿĀmilī long ago eclipsed their peer Sunnī and Shīʿī collections, the genre shows no signs of exhaustion and, given the large size of most *ḥadīth* collections, should remain popular for years to come.

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SCOTT C. LUCAS

Fūdī, ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad

ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad Fūdī (1766–1828) was the younger brother of Shaykh ʿUthmān b. Muḥammad Fūdī (d. 1817), who established the extensive reformed Islamic state known now as the Sokoto Caliphate. He was primarily a scholar and a *mujāhid* in the *jihād* that established this state. With the *jihād* won in 1808, the conquered territories, now to be governed as Islamically as possible, were divided into four quadrants, of which the western and southern were allotted to ʿAbdallāh, with his nephew Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (d. 1839 or 1842) in charge of the south, under ʿAbdallāh. ʿAbdallāh’s headquarters were initially at Bodinga, and then, after 1817, at Gwandu; around him settled many poets and Ṣūfīs who preferred to the huge city of Sokoto, with its traders, soldiers, and fortune-seekers, the exceedingly scholarly atmosphere that ʿAbdallāh encouraged.

ʿAbdallāh was born on 2 Jumādā II 1180/5 November 1766 and died on 6 Muḥarram 1245/8 July 1829. Traditionally described as “tall, fat, and black,” he was a brave, able commander in the *jihād* and was wounded twice. He wrote all his life—his first dated poem was written in 1774 (when he was eight years old) and his last work in 1828—and he is said to have practised writing every night. He

wrote two biographical works in Arabic, *Īdāʿ al-nusukh* (“The repository of texts”) and *Tazyīn al-waraqāt* (“Ornament of pages”), in which he records his teachers and collects his own poetry written before and during the *jihād*, but his major books, all in Arabic, in both prose and verse, were on *tafsīr* (Qurʾānic commentary) (e.g., *Ḍiyāʿ al-taʾwīl*, “The long light,” 2 vols., 1815–6) and Arabic grammar and morphology; several of his eighty-eight known works are on *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) and Islamic government (e.g., *Ḍiyāʿ al-ḥukkām*, “light of the rulers,” written for the *jihād* leaders in Kano in 1806), as well as on *ḥadīth* and Ṣūfism—for instance the Qādiriyya, a widespread Ṣūfī order, of which ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), a Ḥanbalī scholar active in Baghdad, became, after his death, the namesake and patron.

ʿAbdallāh was less willing than his brother, Shaykh ʿUthmān, to compromise on matters of governance and law—he permitted only Mālikī rulings—to the extent that he not only disagreed openly with him (e.g., on ʿUthmān’s use of *takfīr*, the Muslim declaration of another’s Muslim apostasy) but also became so disillusioned with the indiscipline of the *mujāhidūn* that he abandoned the *jihād* in 1806 to leave for Mecca. However, he stopped en route at Kano (in present-day northern Nigeria), in order to perform for his hosts the nightly *tafsīr* in Ramaḍān and to write for them a book on government (*Ḍiyāʿ al-ḥukkām*); in response, they persuaded him to return west and rejoin the *jihād*.

Although formally the *amīr* at Gwandu, he left much of the later campaigning to his nephew and co-administrator, Muḥammad al-Bukhārī, preferring to write and teach. Some 750 students and companions (*aṣḥāb*) of his are known. As a